

The incomprehensible wild

Kate Bohunnis, Sam Gold and Anna Gore

Not knowing can stir anxiety and embarrassment. Experienced as a failure, it can be paralysing, prohibitive. But what if we were to attach worth to not knowing? To treat it as a brief interlude of possibility? Actively occupying the unknown could be a gesture of readiness – on the cusp of action, mind and body poised. To allow room for the unanticipated is to step towards what Emma Cocker describes as ‘the incomprehensible wild’¹; a rich and generative space of potentiality.

Material Girls is the culmination of an eight-month residency at Thebarton’s George Street Studios. Surrounded by sawdust, metal shavings and the whirr of machinery, Adelaide-based artists Kate Bohunnis, Sam Gold and Anna Gore were given the invaluable resources of mentorship, equipment and time. They spent hundreds of hours with George Street’s resident practitioners, and with each other. Compelled by a mission to let intuition guide material experiments, the artists learnt new ways to test the boundaries of their media: compressing, stretching, heating, rotating. They delighted in occupying a space where the unexpected could arise.

Early on, Anna Gore brought a watering can to the shared studio. Weathered and tarnished, its shape immediately attracted and perplexed; a triangular body and a long skinny neck stuck straight up above a handle that jostled for space near a second spout. You cannot use this vessel to water plants. A link was drawn between the expectations of the object and the ones placed upon us, and we put on ourselves, and the desire to disrupt the burden of expectation to make way for more complex ways of being. This became a pivot point for the three artists.

This tension is played on by Sam Gold, whose ceramic forms began as moulds made from functional objects found around the studio. With an interest in the power imbued in votive vessels, they take their cue from moon jars of the Korean Joseon Dynasty (1392–1910), curvaceous porcelain jars created to hold wine or flowers that were adopted into ritualistic practices in the fifteenth century. Gold uses the process by which moon jars were made, creating the initial shape by joining two hemispherical halves in the middle. Then, perhaps in response to the structure of the commercial studio environment, ensures no two moments on the surface are the same – the artists’ thumb and fingers pressing and folding the clay to form a textured, coral-like surface. In the gallery, we encounter them alongside timber offerings – the clay vessels stacked on top of each other, on the cusp of toppling yet holding fast; a relationship between strength and vulnerability that runs through the work of all three artists.

Holding our gaze in the center of the space is Kate Bohunnis’ *an active accumulation*, a steel pipe that appears to be folding, collapsing under the weight of the Praxis Artspace ceiling. The strong metal bows under the pressure of the structure it is meant to be supporting. Through the forging process of heating the metal then hammering it into shape, weakness is beaten into the sturdy structure. In *an active accumulation (1300 meters)*, latex is stretched to its threshold on a steel frame. Evidence of Bohunnis’

¹ Cocker, E, 2013, *Tactics for Not Knowing: Preparing for the Unexpected*, ‘On Not Knowing: How Artists Think’, Black Dog Publishing

background as a printmaker is seen in the lines sewn across the skin-like surface of the tethered latex. Warned that sewing into latex would weaken the fabric, Bohunnis set out to test this limitation and discovered that stitching tight, knotted lines in fact gave the fabric a newfound structural integrity. These processes demonstrate an affective exploration that runs parallel to the artist's exploration of material and form.

For Anna Gore, organic, rounded forms are a satisfying outlet for investigations into emotional and psychological states. Hovering between representation and abstraction, her paintings embrace the mystery, contradiction and imperfection of the natural world. Gore's work embodies a push/pull between the rigour of George Street and the fluidity of intuition. As she harnessed new technical skills, Gore moved away from the rigidity of accuracy, away from straight lines, symmetrical circles, the decipherable fall of light, and towards the uncertainty of the unknown. Looking closely, we see ghosts of abandoned plans left visible under the final layer of paint – the artist's hand deliberately present. Elsewhere, Gore's line-work lifts from the canvas to form structural objects, offering us a bodily encounter with her strangely familiar figures.

The exhibition title conjures an image of a woman empowered in flashy diamonds, pink satin and tight curls. In the studio, Bohunnis, Gold and Gore hold their own in steel-capped boots, wielding heavy metals with clay-covered hands. This discord perhaps perfectly encapsulates these new bodies of work and the state of dynamic tension between expectation and actuality where they proudly reside.

— Joanna Kitto, 2020

Material Girls was presented at praxis ARTSPACE
6 February – 6 March 2020

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